

UPI157

(ARMS)

WASHINGTON (UPI) -- U.S. INTELLIGENCE ANALYSTS HAVE CONCLUDED FROM THE TIMING OF THE FIRST RUSSIAN ARMS DELIVERIES TO THE MIDDLE EAST THAT MOSCOW KNEW AT LEAST 10 DAYS IN ADVANCE ABOUT ARAB PLANS TO ATTACK ISRAEL OCT. 6, IT WAS LEARNED WEDNESDAY.

A PENTAGON SPOKESMAN, WILLIAM BEECHER, SAID "SUBSTANTIAL" SUPPLIES OF AMMUNITION AND OTHER CONSUMMABLES -- POSSIBLY INCLUDING MISSILES -- WERE SHIPPED BY SEA FROM SOVIET PORTS BEFORE THE WAR BROKE OUT AND ARRIVED IN THE MIDDLE EAST "SHORTLY AFTER THE FIGHTING STARTED."

BUT OTHER U.S. GOVERNMENT SOURCES SAID SOME OF THESE WAR SUPPLIES MIGHT HAVE REACHED THE MIDDLE EAST EVEN BEFORE THE EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN ATTACK.

SOURCES SAID THESE ARMS WERE CARRIED ABOARD SEVERAL SOVIET SHIPS BELIEVED TO HAVE REACHED ARAB PORTS BETWEEN OCT. 5 AND OCT. 7. THEY SAID IT TOOK AT LEAST 10 DAYS TO LOAD THESE UNUSUAL CARGOES AND SHIP THEM THROUGH THE BLACK SEA AND ACROSS THE EASTERN END OF THE MEDITERRANEAN.

FROM THESE EARLY ARMS DELIVERIES AND OTHER SIGNS, SUCH AS THE PRE-WAR EVACUATION OF SOVIET DEPENDENTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, BEECHER SAID THE UNITED STATES NOW BELIEVES THE SOVIET UNION KNEW WELL IN ADVANCE ABOUT THE ARAB WAR PLANS.

BEECHER ALSO SAID REPORTS EARLIER THIS WEEK THAT THE SOVIET UNION APPARENTLY HAD COMPLETED THE ARMS AIRLIFT IT STARTED OCT. 10 WERE PREMATURE.

FROM A DAILY PEAK DURING MID-OCTOBER OF UP TO 90 FLIGHTS A DAY, THE SOVIET AIRLIFT TAPERED OFF TO ONLY A FEW FLIGHTS LATE LAST WEEK AND STOPPED COMPLETELY ON SUNDAY AND MONDAY. ANALYSTS CONCLUDED FROM THIS THE RUSSIANS MIGHT HAVE SWITCHED COMPLETELY TO ARMS DELIVERIES BY SEA, WHICH HAVE STEADILY INCREASED IN VOLUME.

BUT BEECHER SAID THERE WERE "SEVERAL FLIGHTS FROM THE SOVIET UNION INTO THE MIDDLE EAST" ON TUESDAY, AND ADDED "THE SOVIET AIRLIFT IS CONTINUING."

SO FAR, HE SAID, THE RUSSIANS HAVE DELIVERED ABOUT 100,000 TONS OF ARMS TO THE ARABS, INCLUDING 15,000 TO 16,000 TONS BY AIR.

THE U.S. ARMS AIRLIFT TO ISRAEL IS CONTINUING JUST UNDER 20 FLIGHTS PER DAY, AND HAS DELIVERED 17,000 TO 18,000 TONS OF ARMS SINCE IT STARTED OCT. 14, BEECHER SAID.

HE SAID ONE U.S. MERCHANT SHIP -- THE FIRST -- HAD BEEN LOADED WITH ARMS FOR ISRAEL AND WAS ABOUT TO SAIL. THE UNITED STATES HOPES TO SWITCH MOST OF ITS ARMS DELIVERIES FROM THE AIRLIFT TO THE SEALIFT, BUT IN THE PAST ONLY ISRAELI-OWNED OR CHARTERED SHIPS HAD BEEN USED TO DELIVER WEAPONS FROM U.S. PORTS.

UPI 11-07 04:49 PES